

( Copy of a script written for the CBC and read by Barrie on five successive weeks in early 1947. Trip was taken Jan.-May 1946.)

ONCE UPON A HONEYMOON. By H.A.Paget (Barrie)

Up to now, everything had been letter-perfect. I had asked the girl to marry me: she had said "yes"; Winnipeg had rung with our wedding bells; we had flown to New York, and walked exultantly up the gangplank of the liner "Cottica",-- turning our backs on the wintry north.

And now, on our 2nd day at sea, here we were, already having to wrestle with a big decision.

It was like this: we knew where we were going: to Bogota, Colombia, where we planned to visit old friends -- a matter of some two thousand miles as the crow flies. What we didn't know was: hōw we were going to go there. Up to this minute, we had thought we knew: we'd simply disembark at the Caribbean island of Curaçao, cross over to the mainland of Colombia at Barranquilla - and so, up to Bogota - a route which was as nearly straight as it is possible to go. But the Captain of our ship had other ideas.

He told us about them over the dinner table on this 2nd day out. "You two are on your honeymoon", he said. "What could be finer than to take a trip up the Orinoco River, cross through Venezuela, up over the Andes Mountains- and enter Bogota from the east?

The others at the table, I noticed, smiled politely but dubiously when the Captain came out with this one. But my bride and I, still hearing those wedding-bells in every sound, replied: "Fine, Captain - tell us more ,"

In the chart-house that evening, high up on the bridge, the genial skipper unrolled a map of the upper half of South America before us. His well-tanned forefinger slid across the paper. "Now this is where you would start"- and the finger came to a stop where the coastline was sharply indented. "This is the mouth of the Orinoco. You can get a boat to take you there from Trinidad - our next stop after Curaçao."

Now I'll have to admit, I'm the kind that gets restless at

the very sight of a map. But Kay, my bride, being a shade more practical, promptly asked: "Have you ever known anyone to do the trip, Captain?" "Yes, indeed I have", he replied; "I had a lady passenger once, who was going down there to write a book. She was going up the Orinoco alone".

When Kay and I talked this over, afterwards, it struck us that the good captain didn't mention ever having heard from the lady again - who knows, maybe she was still there. So the decision was upon us in earnest: which way to Bogota? --by the front door, in comfort, or by the back, in who knows what? As we left the chart-room that fateful night, we peered somewhat dazedly up at the stars. They were getting brighter, we noticed - the further south we went. Suddenly Kay looked up and exclaimed: "Look at that big one, dear. I've never seen such a bright star before."--I gently explained to my bride that she was looking at the ship's light on the masthead. You would probably have seen stars too, if someone had just suggested that you go from Toronto to Vancouver by way of Aklavik .

By the 3rd morning at sea, winter-bound New York had become a vague memory; under the first light touch of the tropics the promenade deck was blossoming with white-clothed loungers overcoats were slinking into steamer-trunks, and passengers walked with a new gait, which seemed to say "this is more like it".

As soon as it became known that there were a couple of honey-mooners on board, who were trying to decide whether or not to detour via Venezuela, advice was showered on us by all. ~~By all. The day before, the~~ <sup>By all. The day before, the</sup> ~~car salesman~~ <sup>car salesman</sup> from Detroit, was especially full of information. He had been in Venezuela-several times. The last time, he'd been lucky to get out of the place with his life...Yes, he'd been selling cars in Caracas when a revolution broke out...the shooting had flared up without warning- and at one point he had locked himself in a hotel bathroom --with six women. He told us

vividly how he had later ducked past snipers, driven at a flat 70 to the airport, and caught the last plane north - to the safety of the good old USA !

(All this time, the other passengers were watching us like hawks, to see if we scared easily). To my relief, Kay didn't. Nor did she take fright when Morrow described the dangers of swimming in the rivers of Venezuela - he had seen a school of electric eels kill a cow just like that !

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Seven days at sea made our first sight of land a thing to remember. Our landfall was at sunset - the mountain-peaks were so many islands above the clouds, flood-lit with rose and purple...passengers stopped in the middle of sentences, peered open-mouthed across the water. **That** was the Andes up there - towering, forbidding- a sentry that questioned our approach to the great continent of South America.

Soon, the vague white line at sea-level became the town of Puerto Cabello, Venezuela - and then, in another 20 minutes, we docked for a stay of two hours.

You'll appreciate that Kay and I made the most of this preview of Venezuelans in their local habitat. From the safe distance of our promenade deck, we looked searchingly down at those white-suited, dark-skinned gents - hm, they had a 'lean and hungry look' alright !Morrow's stories rushed to mind - were these the people who valued a handful of pesos above a human life? -Then I recalled what a naval officer had told me about a prison yard he had once inspected there, filled with ragged men, women and children - some had been there for years, they knew not why. When that same officer was about to return to his ship, an unshaven port doctor had pointed a rusty needle at him and said, in effect, "Your money or I vaccinate you".

I started to wonder - after all, it wasn't as if I were making the trip alone - there was my bride to consider....

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Early next morning, the famous pontoon bridge of Willemstad, Curacao's bustling capital, swung open to admit our ship. It was here that Kay and I would have to make up our minds - either we

disembarked--or we stayed on board as far as Trinidad. So we went ashore to make some enquiries.

The Venezuelan Consul was the essence of Latin politeness. He too slid his forefinger over a map, stopped it at the mouth of the Orinoco, insinuated it upstream as far as a dot marked "Ciudad Bolivar", and said : "Zees is as far as you should go, Señor. Beyond, zere are none of the comforts to which your senora is accustomed, and ze people- zay are good people, but - zay are not used to seeing Americanas." I asked: "And how would we get to Bogota from there? According to this ;map, there's at least a thousand miles of jungle in between." "From Ciudad Bolivar", he explained, "you either fly or drive."

The British Consul's advice was: "Why not fly from here? you could be in Bogota in a matter of hours!.

Back on our ship, Kay and I talked it over for the hundredth time. "Let's go the long way 'round", said Kay. "Suits me", I answered- and so the decision was made: we'd stay on board here and land at Trinidad instead, and from there head for the Orinoco. It was a case (at least for my bride) of angels rushing in where fools feared to tread.

Two days later, when we marched down the gangway at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, we figuratively burned out boat behind us. That same afternoon we bearded the manager of the Venezuelan Steamship Line in his den. "When is the next ship for the Orinoco due?" He explained that there were very few ships at this time of year-the dry season. But we were in luck. One of these was due in six days.

So we bought our tickets; waited in strange and wonderful Trinidad for nine days instead of six; and were then told our ship was in. Her name was the "Guayana"..would we please take our luggage on board that afternoon, select our cabin, return ashore for dinner- and then be back on board by 9 that night - she would sail at 10.

We complied to the letter with these instructions. Ignoring the mid-day sun, we taxied down to the wharf, clambered across oil drums and sacks of flour, and up to the main deck- picked out a cool-looking cabin, stowed our luggage under the bunk (including traveller's cheques and a dozen tree-ripened bananas), returned ashore - and waited restlessly for the evening.

Night falls fast near the Equator, and the moon was rising - the big yellow tropical moon - as 8 o'clock struck, and we taxied the quarter mile down to the wharf again.

The dockside was still and hushed. We knew where the ship lay, and walked confidently toward her - past a pile of sacks smelling strongly of copra. (We had noticed them at noon.) We advanced in silence - hardly believing that we were finally about to take the plunge into the forbidden continent!.

But soon our eyes misgave us - where the good ship Guayana had been at noontime, only a few hours before- there was only an empty space and heaving water! I ran to a watchman's shed. "Where's the Guayana?" I called. "She gone 2 hours ago", came a drowsy voice.."you too late". Rushing to the edge of the wharf, we peered dumbly out over the moonlit harbour...We had missed the boat!

#### UP THE ORINOCO

Fate had dropped us a heavy hint when our ship for the Orinoco River had sailed ahead of time, with our luggage but without us-leaving us stranded in Trinidad.

It was like another voice in the chorus of warnings we had heard: "You'll be sorry if you go through Venezuela".

After missing the first boat, we had had to wait five whole weeks in Trinidad- mostly in borrowed plumes, and using borrowed money. Finally, the "San Vicente" turned up. She was a diminutive freighter, but she was Orinoco-bound, and we were luckily able to persuade her Captain to take us aboard.

The difference between a ship and a boat, as I see it, is that you have to climb up into a ship, and down into a boat. The San Vicente was a boat.

This time we were taking no chances: 5 hours ahead of sailing time we stepped down over her rail, clambered across drums of coconut oil and tins of powdered milk, and up into the pint-sized poopdeck. We'd be spending at least 3 days on board (so we thought), so we looked her over, with an eye to comfort. She was no Queen Mary.

In fact, passenger accomodation was conspicuous by its total absence. Her main deck flirted with the water line. My first thought was: where shall we set up our bridal suite? That large hammock up forward on the focsle deck looked cosy - but it was somewhat conspicuous. And then Captain Mendes came along and gallantly offered us his cabin for the trip- he would gladly sleep on deck. "Muchas gracias, Capitano !", said, in all sincerity.

Besides the bridge, the poop-deck contained a trestly dinner table, 4 hammocks, a washbasin at the rail, one winch and a large coil of rope. Oh yes, half a dozen assorted chairs. Not quite believing it all, we watched them cast off in the moonlight, and felt the first forward movement of the boat. The lights of Trinidad twinkled slowly past, and soon they were dim- we were off to the Orinoco at last !.

When we woke next morning, we expected to find it all a dream. But sure enough, there was the green jungle parading slowly by our porthole - a hundred feet away. And the water was the brown water of a river and not the blue-green sea. Our upstream speed was about 4 knots. During the night we had crossed the Gulf of Paria, and were now in one of the caños or natural canals which crisscross the Orinoco Delta. Already we were deep in a strange continent (and my bride only at Lesson 3 in her brand-new Spanish Grammar.) Up on deck, at the breakfast table, the Captain introduced us all around. At least, we supposed he was doing this, for four black and uncombed heads promptly nodded in our direction. They belonged to his officers. We responded with a bright @@ "Buenos Dias".

It may have been the stubble that was starting to shadow their chins- but we decided they were a sinister lot - mumbling piratical things which we couldn't understand, and flashing us menacing looks. The Chief Mate, in particular, terrified Kay - she was sure he was a refugee from a Chicago gang. At first we ignored the jungle and just watched them slucing down their porridge, wolfing through steak and fried plantains, and gulping black coffee. Then they muttered, wiped their hands on their trousers, rattled back their

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chairs - and disappeared. Only then did we turn to our own watery porridge. This menu, by the way, was repeated at all three meals for the rest of the trip. Once, it is true, we **almost** had a change of diet. We passed a thatch float, tied to the river bank. It had a lean-to on it, occupied by a family and several chickens. A man was waving a hen at us. Our captain shouted "Cuánto?" how much?" and ordered the San Vicente to a stop. Then he rowed over to the float, and bargaining seemed to follow. It led to nothing, though, for the river man soon walked back to his lean-to, with the hen still flapping in his fist.

That was nothing compared to the way we were tantalized by the ship's drinking water. Wild horses couldn't have made us drink the unboiled water placed before us in a cool glass jug at each meal. But worse, was the dripping of the tap right outside our cabin door. This was much frequented by crew members. We suspected that they wanted to take a peak at the Gringos as much as to quench their thirst.

I should say here that, although my wife is essentially a home body, she never did succeed in making our cabin home-like. There's something distracting to the most broadminded of bridegrooms to see another man's shoes under the marital couch - and a stranger's shirt dangling from every hook !

And then there was Alfred -- the only other passenger. Alfred lived right under our forward porthole - he ate, slept and grunted almost within reach of our hands. You see, Alfred was a pig. Orinoco River boats often strand on sand banks - and one day Alfred might keep us all from starving ! So, in many ways, the big fellow added an atmosphere all his own to our bridal chamber. But the character who held us in constant awe was our pilot. Hour after hour he would sit up on the bridge, directing the boat into this caño, and then into that one - hugging the river bank here and then, for no visible reason, ordering us out into midstream. We came to look upon his pyjamas, romeos and old straw hat as a sort of ceremonial costume- peculiar to those who are privy to the mysteries of the Orinoco. Also, we forgave him when he snored

during catnaps in the hammock; that snore, surely, was just the resonant exhalation of one who, in his sleep, consorted with dryads and water-nymphs.

It was the pilot, too, who was always the first to see the wild life of the forest and river. He would rouse us from our comfortable lethargy with a shout which, translated, meant: "Monkeys on the starboard bow". He pointed out our first alligators, sunning their armor-plating on a sandbank; and once he announced porpoises, coloured like the river bottom.

On the third afternoon out of Trinidad, Kay was startled when she entered our cabin to find a strange man in it- stripped to the waist and shaving. It was the Capitano. With considerable presence of mind, Kay asked him: "Are we docking somewhere?" "Si, señora; Tucupita!"

Now, you've probably never heard of Tucupita. I've looked for it on a map since, but I can't find it. :But it was there alright. You don't find buzzards hovering over a mirage.

After being surrounded by jungle for days, it was s surprise to come upon this town - a row of tin-roofed mud houses some 70 feet above the river. To Kay and me, everything about it had a dream-like quality; the very human beings who immediately swarmed on board, looked not quite of this earth. They were dressed in white, haunted-looking, with bent backs. We had some cement to unload - 4500 sacks of it- and the jungle had magically produced these stevedores out of its green hat.

It was at Tucupita that we made our first landing on the terra firma of South America - an off-the-record affair. We left our passports on board, trusting to our good sense not to do anything which would bring us to the notice of the local authorities. (All those stories about crowded Venezuela jails were vivid in our minds.) We climbed up the steps to the deserted plaza, strolled past dark shops, admiring the fragrant dried fish hanging from ceilings, or piles of ladies' combs, -as though we couldn't quite decide which we wanted. Once we nearly stumbled over a sentry sleeping in front of the village barracks and jail. We soon decided it would be best to return to our "home" -which we did.



It was the next day - we had been marvelling at a flight of egrets-- there was a fortune in feathers fluttering above us-- exquisitely white in all that world of green...when suddenly the boat lurched and came to an abrupt stop. We were on bottom! There was a moment of general shouting, with Kay chiming in, "Alfred, you're as good as cooked". Then the Captain called out an order. The mate hurriedly grabbed up an end of rope on the focsle deck and rowed ashore. We watched him wind the rope-end around a tree, and signal back. The rope became taut with a staccato snap - and our little freighter seemed to grind deeper into the sand.

It looked bad. I told Kay to pick out her acre on the shore-- we couldn't live on the San Vicente for the rest of our lives ! Then, after 15 minutes of fruitless tugging, the boat lurched again, and this time we were water-borne again.

On the 7th day of our journey, which was to have taken three, all signs pointed to our imminent arrival in port; to the south, blue hills were seen - the foothills of the Andes; the oilcloth on our dinner table was scoured - for the first time; and, most convincing of all, Captain Mendes was again seen shaving.

Next morning the sun was already high, as Kay and I climbed up the concrete steps at Ciudad Bolivar- three hundred miles inside Venezuela.

We turned to wave a last farewell to the good boat San Vicente. To our surprise, it was the Chief Mate who waved back at us-- the mate with the menacing look. -And then he went about his business- he was exercising Alfred.

"By Bus across the Andes."

At 4.30 one hot March morning my bride and I clambered aboard a bus in the 10-year-old town of El Tigre (the Tiger), on the fringe of the Eastern Venezuelan desert. It was the moment for which we had long waited -the start of an overland journey that would take us right across Venezuela - over desert and up mountain; and ultimately, with a normal amount of good luck, to Bogota, capital of distant Colombia.

Since landing from our Orinoco River boat three weeks before, we had stayed in one of the thatched huts of a missionary compound on the outskirts of Ciudad Bolivar. Last night we had flown a hundred miles to the north, and here we were - waiting in a crowded bus.

We had a rough idea of what lay ahead: we would be two solitary Gringos in a Latin world, where no English would be spoken and we would be real curiosities; we would travel in buses of the 1920s vintage, relying on wayside restaurants where cleanliness would not be the watchword, and taking our chances on a decent bed at night. But we would see Venezuela as few other northerners ever see it, and, being on our honeymoon, we would see it all through rose-colored glasses.

Buses in Eastern Venezuela are painted with the letters "ARC". We asked a fellow passenger what this meant. His swarthy face grinned as he replied: "Aguantate, Resignete, Calleta", which in English means: "Hold tight, resign yourself, keep quiet". We told him we were going to Bogota. "Madre de Dios"!, he exclaimed; "You go so far?" Trying to be nonchalant, I said: "Si. Is it as bad as all that?". "God keep you!" he answered, and turning to Kay, he made the sign of the cross.

I looked around us - at the packed seats and the enclosing walls with their small, glassless window-spaces. The Trinidad proverb came to my mind: "If crab no walk he no see nuddings: if crab walk too far, he get in pot". -Was this bus to be the pot?

That first morning we travelled in low gear over washboard that made anvils of our seats, bereft our tongues of the power-and the

will to speak, and deflated our morale. A stream of thick red dust poured through each window. Passengers who had come prepared donned masks and damp towels; while we, the innocents from the north, made the most of our pocket handkerchiefs and watched our faces and clothing turn a deep terracotta.

about two o'clock, we looked through narrowed eyes to see the hilltown of Valle de la Pascua looming ahead of us. The driver proclaimed our approach by sounding his Klaxon horn. As in most Venezuelan towns, the streets were cobbled and narrow; the sidewalks a bare two feet wide, lined with flat-faced adobe houses, tile or tin-roofed - with high doorways and barred windows. We rumbled into the main square, a juggernaut shattering the peace.

The sun seemed to have drugged the place. It was so high in the sky that the shadow of the solitary tree in the square was as a blanket of darkness fallen from the dusty boughs, and lying immediately beneath them. The streets were empty--the gutter down the middle, bone-dry. Here and there a drowsy burro trampled resignedly on its own shadow; dreaming men sat in silence on their doorsteps; women peered darkly behind their bars - and across the open square a single ragged urchin wandered aimlessly.

But all of us were grateful for Valle de la Pascua. We could straighten our bent knees in its streets - we could breathe its pure, if hot air. The local restaurant boasted two tables laden with bowls of indeterminate soup. On these the passengers had descended like flies by the time we two Gringos ventured our noses into the room, so Kay and I repaired to the shade of the tree in the square. There we smugly munched our biscuits, and moistened our dusty palates with the golden juice of mango and pineapple - picked that morning.

The daily routine of cross-country bus travel in Venezuela is something like this: Departure at 4 or 5 a.m.: a short stop along the way for coffee "caliente"; lunch at a likely town, anywhere

between noon and three - sometimes in dingy cafes that hinted at dysentery to the squeamish northerner. Overnight accomodation leaves much to be desired - especially in the backward eastern half of the country. And buses don't drive through the night. Once, when we entered a town toward midnight (after being on the road since five that morning) the driver found lodging for all passengers except us. (He evidently supposed the gringos needed more de luxe accomodation than the various posadas or inn). When he brought us to the one 'hotel', that was full- so he had to drive us back to the posadas, peddling us at each one in turn. Finally, we followed a pyjama-clad proprietor through the main patio of his inn - ducking hammocks and stepping over pallets bearing black-haired sleepers. We were shown into a low room, ventilated only by an airspace where the walls didn't quite meet the ceiling. We bade him "Buenas Noches", strewed newspapers over the rumpled sheets, and soon were fast asleep.

At 4 next morning we threaded our way in the dark to the front door. It was blocked by the proprietor's cot. A light sleeper, he quickly reached out an acquisitive hand, and as soon as we had duly filled it with pesos, he pushed his cot aside and let us out.

Traffic on the higher reaches of the Trans-Andean highway is so rare that when a car passes through a town, necks crane and tongues wag. This is partly because the road is so narrow, winding and cloud-enveloped, that only fatalists venture forth. For mile after mile, the Highway probes in and out of the stony vertebrae of the Andes. Wooden crosses are numerous at the turns - and they are not CROSSES!

In the safety and comfort of this studio room, it's not easy to evoke the tight-chested sensation of those moments when we could see only 10 or 20 yards in front of us. Around the narrow turns, especially, we prayed there's be no car coming our way. Sometimes when the wind would blow holes in the cloud, we could look down and see a zig-zag ribbon strewn across the valley floor. It was the road we had just come up, a mile or so below our window. Then, there was always the driver to think about. He only needed to misjudge once and we'd had it! I particularly remember our second day out from Caracas. We had left the heat of the tropics

beneath us, and were snaking upward in earnest - plunging in and out of clouds as though in a plane. The higher we rose, the muddier became the road, and the sharper the turns. The higher we rose, the muddier became the road, and the sharper the turns. Finally, the driver had to take these in 3 stages: 1st, forwards, gauging the edge as best he could in the mist ...then back with a jerk to the outer edge. Then he would stop - and lurch forward again. The passengers always expressed their relief by cheering (we just sighed, and said a small prayer of thanks, remembering the stories of faulty brakes on these ancient buses.)

Even at this altitude we notice solitary farmers, in their red-lined ponchos, ploughing nearly vertical fields with wooden stumps drawn by oxen.

That afternoon we crossed our first "paramo", or pass. We knew we were very high, for we could see our breaths, and our hands and feet were cold. Now and then we caught glimpses of dripping, moss-covered stones and bleak gray mountainside. Suddenly the bus levelled off, - we sat upright in our seats, and came to a halt beneath a gigantic statue. Between wisps of gusty cloud we saw a bronze eagle poised on a stone. He held a wreath in his mouth. The inscription read (in translation): "To the glory of the Liberator"--Simon BOLIVAR. The altitude was nearly 13 thousand feet- no wonder Kay's knees sagged when she stepped down from the bus. This was the Great Divide of the Andes, the "Paramo del Aguila", or Pass of the Eagle. We didn't stop long here- thank goodness. It was hard to breath properly; no place for mortals.

There was something exhilarating, rewarding about our descent to the old Colonial town of Merida. Every curve successfully navigated meant one more behind us - which we would never have to face again. Circulation returned to our fingers; there was less and less passing of the warming rum-flask between bride and groom. The sky cleared. Spread beneath us in the setting sun were golden-green valleys, purpled here and there with fields of pineapple, or swaying with sugar cane and corn. We thought of Shangri-La....

Soon we looked down on red-tiled roofs, adobe houses, cobble streets, - and in the centre, a green plaza with tiny moving figures.

Kay and I tarried in Merida - relishing its hoary university atmosphere, its massive Spanish architecture. We lingered in the market-place, and strolled its outer streets, which overlooked a great valley, with wonderful mountain vistas beyond. After the long days on the Highway, it was good to savour so much warmth and seclusion. Those very mountains which we had somehow penetrated, often with our hearts in our mouths, now looked down on us newlyweds protectively, as we sat in the charming square under the statue of Bolivar. He was astride a bronze horse, and held his sword high to the sky. Behind him, towered three snow-capped peaks. Weary of the road as we were, we saw something of a challenge in his gesture. Tomorrow we would brave the heights once again -at 4 in the morning we could clamber into a bus, and-with luck we would sleep in Colombia that night.

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"BOGOTA"

Another mile, and we'd be in Colombia - the signpost said so in Spanish that we could understand.

So I interrupted our wayside luncheon long enough to unpack our passports. When I waved them triumphantly at my bride, Kay asked: "Are you sure they're in order? I was just thinking - when does the visa for Colombia expire? After all, we stayed in Trinidad five extra weeks !"

What a thought ! In sudden apprehension, I thumbed through the stiff pink pages....She was right ! -the visa for Colombia was good only through March - and it was now April! Ten minutes later, bride and groom stood like two guilty schoolchildren before the desk of the Colombian Consul in this border town, in the heart of darkest South America (so we felt about it at the time.) The black-lashed eyes that looked out through the consul's hornrims were without trace of expression. Only the head moved slowly from side to side. "I have no authority to extend visas given in Winnipeg", he said.

I started to dislike Colombians. Hadn't we sailed an ocean, ascended a jungle river, flown over a desert, and risked our very necks crossing the Andes in a bus - all, in order that we might see his Colombia? And now, for a technicality, he was shutting the door in our faces !

"Use your Spanish dictionary!", said Kay in a stage-whisper. So the little red book and I went into a huddle, and tried frantically to appeal to the man's sympathy. We said: "Both my Senora and I have always yearned to see your beautiful country; we have read about it; we know its geography; we have very good friends - "amigos" - in Bogota - and now we have chosen Colombia out of the whole world to visit on our honeymoon!"

So much depended now on my Spanish that somehow I suddenly started to express my thought - my gestures became more emphatic. The consul's head stopped shaking - my eloquence was starting to tell....Was that a trace of a diplomatic smile I saw?...

Silently, he reached for his pen, wrote something in each of our passports-and handed them back to us. It was all we needed.

Two days later we finally stepped down on the curb of the venerable, long-sought city of Bogota-capital of Colombia. The city nestles in the corner of a plateau nearly 9 thousand feet high. To see it in its true perspective, you climb Monserrate, which rises another 2000 feet from the suburbs of the capital. (we went up in the funicular railway-at an angle of 81 degrees!) From the portico of the church on the summit-which we were told was built of stone carried up on the backs of the penitent - we looked down over the plateau or savannah, green and broad. Beyond it, far in the mist, we saw the central range of the Andes. Further still, out of sight, was a third range of mountains, and then the Pacific.

Four hundred years before us, a Spanish general named Quesada had come here, like ourselves, from a great distance and under difficulties. I tried to picture him, with his sweating army, slashing his way through jungle and mountain pass, until finally he subdued the Indians who had built Bogota, and proclaimed it the capital of a new Spanish province - in the name of King Philip the 2nd. Remembering the wilderness that we had come through from the east, and seeing the wall-like mountain ranges in front of us to the west, we wondered why he had chosen such a secluded, isolated community for a country's capital. Maybe Kay was right when she suggested that, after perspiring in the lowlands in his coat of Spanish steel, General Quesada had probably appreciated the cool, Alpine air of Bogota.

During our few weeks in the capital, we never forgot this view of the city from the mountain-top. It explained many things to us, and softened our judgments. We felt we understood why, for example, the Bogotanos had been the last to discard the Spanish mantilla of all South American cities. In fact, there was hardly a custom or way which had not been influenced by those 8760 feet. It Bogota is parochial, die-hard, stuffy even-



we remembered that it is, and has always been-hemmed in not only by three mountain ranges, but also by a habit of thought that goes straight back to the Conquistadors.

As an example, the characteristic homes of the Bogotanos are built around a patio which is open to the sky. Most of the rooms surround this patio, leading directly off it. Central heating is of course not feasible with such a plan - which was fine for sunny Spain, whence it came - but hardly ideal for the gray mists and chill rains of Bogota.

The younger generation is building homes in the North European and American style. But even so, their habit of thought demands a compromise. I remember our first evening at the home of our host Camilo. His home was new- it would not have looked out of place in Rosedale, Toronto or Shaughnessy, Vancouver. Yet it wasn't centrally heated, and the guests who sat on either side of us at dinner kept their fur coats on throughout the meal- and no one thought it strange! (We the innocents from Winnipeg, sat and shivered throughout the evening- 4 degrees north of the Equator ! We later learned their reasoning: it was charmingly Latin in its logic. "It's cold and wet out tonight (they would say); if we light a fire in the fireplace, our guests will become warm - and then, when they go out into the night air to return home, they will be sure to catch their death of cold. No--we won't light a fire - it's too cold."

The two classes of Feudal Spain are the two classes of present-day Bogota - the dons and the peons. The good old middle class, that modern creation, has hardly dared to show its modest head. A drive out into the country from the capital could be counted on to highlight this ancient survival. As we approached a village, the road ahead would be crowded with peons - some of them staggering blindly. This seemed to embarrass our host - that we, foreigners, should see such waywardness in his country - so he would sound his horn in its most contemptuous tone. The men would hold their ground until the last moment - and then dodge, and snarl back hatred at us. In explanation of their attitude, Camilo

would say "Chicha"-as though to account for everything. (Chicha being a cheap beer made from corn -and guaranteed to make you forget you're a peon in 20 minutes or so.) This chicha is obviously the poor man's solace. Once, when I noticed that the streets of the capital were quiet as the grave after 9 each night, I asked what the people do for amusement. The answer was brief: "Chicha, movies; movies, chicha. And once a year, the toros-(the bullfights)."

One of the wonders of Bogota is that eternal spring is always only half an hour's drive away. We went there one afternoon. Camilo's dashboard had both altimeter and siren. Whenever we came to a sharp turn he would sound the latter - a mournful wail in the misty heights; -and we would watch with fascination as the needle of the altimeter kept dipping...at 8000 feet we bought apples and plums from a roadside orchard; in a matter of minutes we dropped to 7,000.6,000..five, and finally 4500, where we came out below the clouds,-and squinted in the sunlight. This was the town of Mesitas, at the altitude of warm Spring-time. Here we bought oranges, bananas and pineapples, grown locally-and bathed in an outdoor pool - only half an hour away from grey Bogota.

Back in the capital the next day, I said to Camilo: "We want to see the old market. How do you get there?" "I wouldn't go there if I were you ", said Camilo: "You'd just see a lot of peons and some vegetables." Fortunately, Camilo had to go to his office that day, so Kay and I went off in search of the market. We asked our way of a passerby - in our best Spanish. Recognizing us as foreigners, his national pride came to the fore, and he said:"I wouldn't go there, Senor - it's dull, and not very clean. Have you seen the cathedral? that is really magnificent !" A little further on, Kay sniffed and said, "We're nearly at the market".

Our diary for that day reads:

"Ignored Camilo's warning - visited principal market of Bogota-a teeming, noisy community, in a large building half open to the sky. Chattering women seated on ground beside piles of indescribable tropical fruits, sun-dried pottery, tethered poultry, infants parked in fruit boxes for the day, 6 large orchids for

14 centavos (I bought my bride a dozen); basketware galore, blankets and rugs in geometric patterns. Saw crowd watching 2 men on platform. One dipped fingers into a liquid, reached into the other's mouth, rubbed gums gently, and in a trice he removed a molar which he nonchalantly displayed to crowd - who apparently were waiting their turns. (Camilo later verified this - a secret of the medicine men.) Indian family from the Amazon in gala costume allow us to photograph them - for two pesos a pose ! He wears hand-woven cloak, 6 necklaces, and jet-black hair braided down to waist; she carries round-faced bambino in red scarf slung across back. Wrinkled old woman walks past with sack which emits squeals. Has she bought a pig in a poke?"

We also looked in at the cathedral- Camilo and his friends had extolled its gold-leaf ceiling. The diary says: "Saw ceiling alright, but only after forcing our way through barricade of scrawny arms begging piteously at entrance. The irony: so many empty stomachs outside, so many diamonds and emeralds on the inside".

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Just as we were starting to breathe freely in Bogota's rarefied air, the Voice of the Siren summoned us North again, in the form of a telephone call. A last-minute cancellation enabled us to make convenient connections on the long journey home to Canada- by river, sea, land and air.

Through the open window of the toy train that was to take us down to our Magdalena River boat, Camilo warned: "See that you don't get caught on a sandbank ! Adios !" We started forward, at long last homeward-bound. Through the mist we saw Camilo's hand waving goodbye - it was our last contact with the Ivory Tower that is Bogota.

AND SO HOME

The crowded train which was taking us down to the Magdalena River boat from Bogota, came suddenly to a stop. "Caramba", we said. What could this mean--there was no station in sight. "Oh, oh," said Kay. "This probably means we'll miss our boat". For three hours the train stood as still as the trees around us. Eventually the conductor put his head into our crowded carriage long enough to shout: "Trasbordar!" meaning "Everybody change". There had been a derailment on the line ahead.

The scene that followed made Kay and me feel we were a pair of DP's (displaced persons) fleeing our tormentors, and not two carefree honeymooners, which we were.

The orderly group of seated passengers suddenly became a milling, shouting crowd, wrestling with luggage and shrieking babies. Kay and I abandoned all but two of our seven suitcases, and followed the throng along the muddy right-of-way between the track and the wilderness. The walking space was barely a yard wide. There were eight coachloads of us- some carrying most of their worldly goods, it seemed, including poultry and a small pig; and we were joined from Heaven knows where, by a company of armed soldiers. They merged with us, in our march to the train ahead. Once, a stretcher bearing a cripple charged through us, high on the shoulders of four carriers- and I had to duck. When I looked up again, Kay was gone! Immediately, I lost all interest in catching the boat--all I wanted to know was whether I'd ever see Kay again. In the thick surge of people, it was out of the question to do anything but move onward with them. In time I came in sight of the coach of our new train. The bottom step leading up to it was at least four feet from the ground. And whom should I see in midair above it, being hauled up like a sack of flour, but my bride?--a gallant priest was deftly hoisting her aboard. When I later entered the coach myself, there she was, seated miraculously amidst all our missing luggage, and smugly nibbling some of the priest's roast chicken.

As the new train had but three coaches, and now held the human con-

tents of the original 8-coach train - in addition to its own passengers -I was never able to get near to Kay until we reached our destination. But I was able to peek at her from time to time through a hole in the wing of the toy bomber that the little girl in front of me was nursing as though her life depended on it.

That evening we came to a stop on the wharf of Puerto Salgar, in full view of the boat that was to take us down-river to the sea . We were greeted by music - of a wild,insistent kind..But more of this later.

The Magdalena River boats are old stern-wheelers, formerly used on the Mississippi. To board her, we had to walk right past her innards - the blazing furnace, the piles of fuel wood, her valves and gears and shaft- -and at the stern, the great slatted frame of her wheel. Shades of the Mississippi !

Soon the shrill whistle piped, someone shouted "Abordo!", and the good ship "Atlantico" started off downstream. So far, so good. We should make Barranquilla in time to catch our ocean liner - if nothing happened....

The Magdalena River is the one natural highway between Bogota and the outside world. It had been the thoroughfare of the Spaniards who first colonized Colombia - they had sailed up it from Spain with their household furniture, their statues of the Virgin - their wives and children, and their livestock. Down it, in turn, the Conquistadors had sent home pagan gold for Christian coffers.

Kay and I had a cabin on the top deck. We were travelling "De lujo"-de luxe-which meant we had running water and music every meal (whether we wanted it or not). The orchestra would sit in the doorway of the dining saloon - a flute, a banjo, 2 saxophones and 2 drums. Each of their 4 tunes was a race- with the flute usually winning by a neck. (This was hardly dinner music!)

Among our distinguished fellow-passengers were a Spanish marquis in a Hollywood shirt, looking very bored with the primitive jungle through which we glided; a refugee couple, he portly with

a Vandyke beard, and she young and Continental; a black-robed priest who paced the deck each morning, reading his prayer-book and peeking in at our window as he passed.

On the third day we saw what the rainy season means to the river dwellers- their primitive, destitute-looking homes along the bank were mostly awash. Some of their thatched huts were on stilts- there were flimsy trestles for pathways. In the drenching rain these hamlets were surely the world's most forlorn communities- only the green waving clusters of the coconut palms hinting at a smile. The further downstream we went, the hotter it grew, and the darker were the skins of the villagers- in time, they were mostly negro.

Knowing it would be scorching at Barranquilla, we went ashore at one of the better-looking river towns to buy me a hat. In no time, everyone on shore knew I was looking for a hat - one merchant would shout it across the road to another. I made it clear, I thought, that I wanted a larger size- not a large hat. But they kept showing me hats with larger and larger brims- but the same small headsize. Proving, I suppose, that the Nordic cranium is larger than the Latin.(mine certainly was.)

The river was now no longer a narrow stream between steep mountains; it had become a broad waterway in open country. The land was flattening out - the eye could see further; and on the fourth day, a cool breeze brought us the smell of the sea. Once landed at Barranquilla, we learned that our north-bound liner would not sail for a couple of days, so we decided to take a quick visit to Cartagena. It was really a must, for back in New York, friends who heard we were going to Colombia, said, "Don't miss Cartagena"! It's practically as the Spaniards built it when it was a fortified seaport four centuries ago !"

So we drove over, westward along the Caribbean coast, for three hours under the glaring sun. After austere Bogota, we felt as though we had been released from confinement. In the towns-

shaded by groves of palms - we saw smiles on people's faces-we heard light-hearted Calypso-like music (different from the minor keys of Bogota)-and there was an air of activity and prosperity. People wore white, instead of black - and there were no twisted beggars. Burdens here were carried in trucks, not on women's backs.

The Spaniards had every reason to make their walls thick when they built Cartagena. It was there that most of the gold of the Spanish Main was stored, before trans-shipment to Spain. And where there are big prizes to win, there are usually daring hearts to try for them. There were El Draque (Francis Drake), Henry Morgan, and others. The main gate into the city we estimated to be 30 feet - every foot a tribute to the prestige of Drake . Eight cars can drive abreast along the main wall around the city. One of the biggest fortresses, San Felipe, is a hill of solid concrete. Kay and I were taken through its maze of tunnels, right down to the sea. Remarking on the low ceilings, our guide said they were built like that to make it awkward for any tall Englishman who (as Drake and Morgan did) might assault the fort.

The streets of Cartagena have a Christmas-card look (minus the snow, of course)-they're narrow, winding, cobble-stoned, with the upper stories of houses jutting out into the middle. And there's a grim reminder of the past in the Casa de la Inquisicion. This was the spacious headquarters of the Inquisition for the whole New World. The victims who entered it, did so through one of the most elaborately carved doorways I ever hope to see- by way of consolation, no doubt. Nearby, in the museum, I asked to see some of the instruments of torture, but I was told, politely but firmly, that the Church did not place them on exhibit.

At our last night in Barranquilla before sailing, we had a grand dinner at the hotel, including for me, at least, a dozen raw oysters. (Kay, being a prairie girl at heart had not developed a liking for these morsels.) Around 1 a.m. I awoke writhing with agony of the damned. Kay was perky enough, thank heavens- and was able next morning to phone the Steamship Company, and in her minimal Spanish , ascertained that we should be at the dock by noon. I was just able to stagger up and dress at 11, then get

downstairs (passing some unpleasant remarks to the cashier about tropical seafood) - then into a taxi to the dock.

Before you leave Colombia, your passport must be stamped by the port captain. So while Kay attended to the luggage, I managed to stagger to his office. He refused to stamp our passports - "Why hadn't we obtained an exit permit while in Bogota?" I retorted that in Bogota they had said this would not be necessary. "If the Chief of Police in Barranquilla will permit me, I will stamp your passport--otherwise no !" But this was Saturday- and the Chief of Police could not be found. I sagged against the port captain's desk, thought of my bride guarding our luggage on the wharf- and looked out at the liner..she would be sailing soon now..but with us or without us? (I reflected that this country had been difficult to enter, and also to leave, it seemed).

After nearly an hour of wrangling, in which even the steamship agent (called in to help) lost his patience- the port captain wrote something in our passports, and handed them slowly back to me with a wry smile.

Within minutes, bride and groom were walking (I weakly, but gratefully) up the steep gangplank of our homeward-bound steamer.

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The long journey outward had been wonderful while it lasted; but that night, on deck, we made very sure it was the North Star we saw above our bow.

Footnote--February 1993. It must be remembered that when we made this trip, there were few tourists in the places we visited--the war only ended months before. We were a great novelty wherever we went, and sights which are commonplace now to many Canadians were then unknown, which made this story much more interesting, and worth telling to listeners of the C.B.C.--which it might not be today. Barrie was constricted as to length of this series- and missed telling many interesting things we did, of course. K.P.